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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3352
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1529
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7809
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9688
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2017
TAGS: KDEM PGOV MARR PREL BG
SUBJECT: AMBITIOUS ARMY PROPOSAL FOR NATIONAL VOTER ID CARD

REF: DAO DHAKA IIR 69 25053107

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires a.i.Geeta Pasi, reason para 1.4 (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary. An ambitious army proposal for a national
voter ID card could, if accepted, further delay elections.
End summary.

¶2. (S/NF) Post has obtained a Bangladesh army proposal for
creating national and voter identification cards that was
presented on February 17 to Chief Advisor Fakhruddin Ahmed,
the Council of Advisors, Chief Election Commission Dr. ATM
Shamsul Huda, and Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Moeen U. Ahmed.

¶3. (S/NF) The proposal calls for creating a national citizen
identification database with each citizen having a personal
identification number (PIN) and including additional
information such as image and biometric data for a
"multipurpose national use" like a national ID and voter
list. The estimated cost is nearly three billion taka or USD
42 million to register 90 million voters. These costs
include computers, printers, electricity, card stock and
plastic laminant.

¶4. (S/NF) The immediate objective is creation of a database
to enable a national election. To accomplish this, the
proposal envisions a paper laminated national ID card
containing a "bar code conversion of a thumb impression,
photographs and individual signature or thumb impression."
It envisions 8,000 local-level collection teams, composed of
eight people, to register 60-80 voters a day, and completing
the project seven to eight months after a four-month
preparation phase.

¶5. (S/NF) The Bureau of Statistics would be responsible for
maintaining the national database and ensuring connectivity
to agencies like the Home Ministry, Local Government
Ministry, Land Ministry, National Board of Revenue, unnamed
intelligence agencies, and the Departments of Passports and
Immigration. Local collection teams would be connected
electronically to a central server. To guard against false
voter registrations and to authenticate individuals at the
polling center, there would be:

--Assignment of a unique 11-digit unique PIN to each voter;
--Inclusion of a photograph in the ID card and on the voter
list for comparison at the time of polling;
--Inclusion of thumb impression in voter registration form
and computer database for comparison at the time of voting;
--Computer automated comparison of thumb impression against
voter data; and
--Severe penalties for intentional duplicate data entry.

¶6. (S/NF) Comment: The proposal's technical challenges are great since it ambitiously assumes, among other things, the availability of computer literate personnel at the local level and of electronic connectivity even in remote areas. While this proposal may appear overly elaborate as a means to a credible and timely election, it may make more sense to its proponents if they see it as a long-term effort to produce a reliable national database to serve as the basis for a national ID card and even a Machine Readable Passport.
PASI